

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE BROTHERS STRUGATSKY TO THE GENRE OF
RUSSIAN SCIENCE FICTION

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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Arkady and Boris Strugatsky are the most prolific Soviet science fiction writers, who focused, above all, on the social themes and with satire discussed the political and social agendas in the Soviet society.

This thesis explores the contribution of the Brothers Strugatsky to the genre of Russian science fiction and looks into the main themes of their most famous novels. At the beginning, I present a short overview of the history of Russian science fiction. Further on, I explore the Brothers Strugatsky's role in the development of science fiction in the Soviet Union and single out the two phases of their literary career: utopian and anti-utopian. Furthermore, I examine the Strugatskys' most prominent novels and their main themes: human nature and Soviet bureaucracy. Finally, I analyze to what extent the Strugatskys' novels fit into the Soviet reality and how they shape the genre of science fiction in Russia.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Overview of the Development of Russian Science Fiction

After October Revolution under Lenin regime, the utopian science fiction literature was regarded as a proper method for popularizing the ideas of radical political and technological progress. In 1920, with Lenin's encouragement, speculative fiction flourished in the Soviet Union. Compared to the beginning of the twentieth century, the period after 1920 produced a considerably greater number of works about utopian Marxist societies. The most influential author at that time was Aleksei Tolstoy, who under the influence of Jack London and Herbert Wells described in his novel *Aelita or The Decline of Mars* (1923) the revolution on the Mars, mixing in a romance story between a rocket scientist and the princess of Mars. His novel *Aelita* (1923) about the journey to Mars gained immense public popularity and in 1924 in the Soviet Union the novel was adapted to a silent film. For Darko Suvin, "the novel (*Aelita*) raised extraterrestrial utopianism beyond pulp imitations of Verne, Wells, and Burroughs to a height not reached again until after Stalin's death by Efremov" (Suvin 261).

Another prolific Soviet author who fits the genre is Vladimir Maiakovsky. *The Bedbug* and *The Bath* are his contributions to the speculative fiction where he satirizes the bourgeoisie and bureaucracy.¹ Mayakovsky's propaganda and real-time battle with bureaucracy led to his suicide in 1930, however, his works inspired his contemporaries, such as Evgenii Zamiatin. In his most famous dystopian satirical work *We* (1920),

¹ Potts, Stephen. "The second Marxian invasion: the fiction of the Strugatsky brothers." p.6. 1991.

Zamiatin created the model for the subsequent dystopias of the twentieth century. He was criticizing the Bolsheviks and he denounced the West and capitalism. This work symbolized the transition from utopia to dystopia in Soviet science fiction. Zamiatin's literary activity led to his later exile in 1931 and the false conclusion of the government that he was counterrevolutionary. Another science fiction author was Alexander Beliaev, whose novels and stories were largely influenced by Jules Verne and Herbert Wells, with his most famous novel being *The Amphibious Man* (1928), about a human altered for underwater life.

Compared to Lenin regime, where the genre of science fiction flourished in the Soviet Union, Stalin's period signified the "Dark Age of Soviet Science Fiction" when at the end of the twenties Stalin imprisoned and executed a great number of utopian writers. Like the tsars before him, Stalin was made nervous by the social experimentation endorsed by utopian writers. He reduced science fiction to the genre concerned only with the technological achievements of the near future, such as radar and oil drills. Authors like Alexander Belyaev were able to survive only by reducing their technological miracles to the level of fairy tale fantasy.

In the 1930s under Stalin period socialist realism became the officially approved method, the method having its purpose the advancement of the goals of socialism and communism. The official Communist doctrine of "Socialist Realism" for Soviet literature dictated that literature had to fulfill a utilitarian purpose: educating, not merely entertaining.

The renaissance of science fiction took place after Stalin's death in 1954. In the post-Stalin era, in the late '50s and early '60s, the Soviet intelligentsia was beginning to

liberalize in all spheres of life. The Khrushchev's "thaw" period signified a loosening of official control not only in the sphere of technology, but also over Soviet science fiction. The Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956 destroyed the Stalinist myth about society and literature. The sensational achievements of Soviet natural sciences symbolized by the first Sputnik launched in 1958 further shook Russian society and science and had a huge influence on literature. Russian critics regarded the Space success very optimistically and they saw future in Russian space program as Russia had the world's best and most talented scientists who were aiming at success.

After a generation of rejection, new respect was granted under Khrushchev to the view that contemporary developments in science constituted a "second industrial revolution," the so-called Scientific-Technological Revolution (STR), and hence a radical transformation in the forces of production requiring adaptation in the ideological superstructure (Buccholz: 147-53).

Space exploration has always been a competition platform for the Soviet Union and the United States. At the early stages the competition was driven by a "Space Race" between the two countries. However, the Soviet space program first achieved success in space, including the first human spaceflight by Yuri Gagarin in 1961 and the launch of the first space station Saliut 1, in 1971.

Propelled by the successes of the space-program, Khrushchev seemed willing to accept the challenge of acknowledging the idea of Scientific-Technological Revolution: namely, that Soviet society would have to commit itself to developing its scientific and technical resources in order to assure the final victory of Communism over Capitalism.

Thus, the Soviet science fiction became inspired by the technological progress, space pioneering in the first place. Early science fiction authors, such as Alexander Beliaev, Grigorii Adamov, Vladimir Obruchev, Aleksei Tolstoi, Aleksander Kazantsev, stick to hard science fiction, being influenced by Herbert Wells and Jules Verne. Their novels included science predictions, adventure, space travel, often with hues of communist utopia or satire against capitalism.

The new science fiction wave, so-called “warm stream” or “Efremov school” rich in tradition and individual talent found a wide audience among the young age and the intelligentsia. Those who belonged to “Efremov school” were eager to deal with an increasing range of subjects from sociological to anthropological, from astronautics through cybernetics to utopianism. (Darko Suvin, *Utopian tradition of Russian SF*, 1971 p.173). Ivan Efremov, a scientist himself, wrote a utopian novel *Andromeda*, where he depicted technological and emotional problems of life in space. However, his characters were superior human beings to the point that they were unbelievable and did not resemble people from the real world. Nevertheless, he changed the face of science fiction, inspiring the new generation of science fiction writers. He proved that a good science fiction had to possess literary quality and a humanist perspective as well. No statement better summarizes the view of Arkady and Boris Strugatsky who became Efremov’s most successful disciples.

The Brothers Strugatsky

Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, after Efremov, were held up as the most representative authors of the new “warm stream”. They became best-known Soviet science fiction writers in the late 1950-s, continuing the Russian tradition of science fiction. They began writing within the tradition of the socialist realist quasi-fairy-tale paradigm, which they adapted to represent the ideals of the generation of scientists and engineers whose leading position in Soviet culture had been validated by the success of the Soviet space program and the de-Stalinization of science. Their goal was to rescue the vision of a socialist utopia from the monumental distance to which Stalin Cult had placed it, and to return it to a human scale.

Arkady Strugatsky was born in 1925. He graduated from the Academy of Languages in Moscow and was a translator of Japanese and English. Boris Strugatsky was born in 1933 and was eight years younger than Arkady. He was a graduate in applied mathematics from the State University of Saint Petersburg and was an astrophysicist at the Pulkovo Observatory. Thus, both Strugaskys have a scientific background. Their books combine both scientific and technological knowledge with literary talent, characterized by a literary as well as scientific imagination. Their books are both entertaining and intelligent and are written with style and skill. Compared to the rest of the Soviet writers, the Strugatskys, being scientists were prone to greater freedom in their works, because at that time science fiction did not received as much attention from the political censorship as the rest of the Soviet literature, thus the writers in the scientific field could say much more than those working in most realistic and conventional literary genres.

The Strugatskys were mainly writing for, and read by, the so-called intelligentsia. Their works were witty and were aimed at people who “think”. Indeed, in the Strugatskys’ books there are many layers of ideas and thoughts that may reveal themselves after second or third reading and demand open-minded way of thinking. Arkady Strugatsky in one of his interviews made the following comment about the science fiction ideology:

Soviet science fiction is the child of the great revolution, and that explains its mission and its special features. Our science fiction is socially and ideologically committed and humane...Its ideal is communist humanism and it approaches all problems from this angle...It fosters an active mentality, a kind of mentality that is intolerant of narrow-minded bourgeois attitudes (Soviet Literature, 122).

Darko Suvin wrote that the “sophisticated works of the Strugatsky brothers were popular and resulted in the advent of the new era of Soviet science fiction”. Suvin further stated that “the brothers Strugatsky are undoubtedly the best Russian science fiction writers around”². Rightly, the Strugatsky brothers are considered to be the best and the most popular Soviet science fiction writers. The Strugatskys were recognized by Soviet critics such as for example, Britikov who said: “The works of Arkady and Boris Strugatsky most of all clearly reflect their successes in mastering modern fantastic novels with socialist themes.”³

An interesting aspect of many of their science fiction works is the insistence on the value of the individual – both as a person and as a scientific innovator. The latter is

² Suvin, Darko. “Utopian Tradition Russian Science Fiction.” p.156.

³ Britikov, Anatolii. “Soviet Science Fiction Novel.” p.335.

often something of an eccentric who works on his own and does not fit into the “establishment,” and as a rule he is treated sympathetically. In their works the humanistic element is prominent.⁴

The Strugatskys are dedicated to a general theory of science fiction – the introduction of elements of the extraordinary. Britikov notes this in his book on the Soviet science fiction novel:

Referring to the historical development of the forms of science fiction, the Strugatskys confirm that science fiction conforms to the popular literary criteria, but it also is characterized by the use of literary techniques and the introduction of the element of the unusual or extraordinary (Britikov, 335).

The high esteem of the Strugatskys’ works is shared by many foreign critics and science fiction writers. For instance Franz Rottensteiner, a German science fiction critic, stated that “the two acknowledged masters of science fiction in the USSR are the Strugatsky brothers, who write only as a team”.⁵ Rottensteiner further stated that “the Strugatsky brothers have succeeded in writing the most stringent social criticism to be found in science fiction”⁶.

As story tellers the Strugatskys are superior to those among their fellow science fiction writers in the West who have similarly adopted for their stories a pseudo-medieval feudalistic background, [as the Strugatskys did in *Hard to Be a God*],

⁴ Ginsburg, Mirra. “The Ultimate Threshold: A Collection of the Finest Soviet Science Fiction.” New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston. p.viii. 1970.

⁵ Rottensteiner, Franz. “The Science Fiction Book, An Illustrated History.” New York, Seabury Press, p.122. 1975.

⁶ Rottensteiner, Franz. “View From Another Shore.” European Science Fiction, New York, Seabury Press, p.xii. 1973.

not to mention the linguistic skill of the Russian author team, their mastery in creating a bureaucratic jargon.⁷

The science fiction critic Alan Townsend pointed out that “the works of the Strugatskys seem to indicate the future of Soviet science fiction, a move towards that consideration of moral, social, and ethical problems which has always been the mark of the best science fiction in the West.”⁸

It is interesting that in the English-speaking world among the names of Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury and Arthur Clarke, few people would recognize the name of the Strugatskys. They have not entered the international literary mainstream, perhaps because their work is more clearly rooted in the traditions of the science fiction genres, or because they frequently delve into political and dialectical matters. (Stephen Potts, 7) Also much of the cultural tradition, its folklore and satirical stereotypes, used in their works do not translate well.

The Main Features of the Strugatskys' Works

As mentioned, earlier books of Arkady and Boris Strugatsky are reminiscent of social problems and often include satire on Soviet society. Bearne said with justification about science fiction:

We have before us not a window into the future, but an unusually placed observation point from which we can command an excellent view of the present... Those who have only superficial knowledge of science fiction think

⁷ Rottensteiner, Franz. “View From Another Shore, European Science Fiction.” New York, Seabury Press. p.xv. 1973.

⁸ Townsend, Alan. “Soviet Science Fiction.” The Listener, Oct. 14, p.646. 1963.

that it deals primarily with the future. This, however, is a mistaken point of view. Science fiction deals above all with contemporary world and forecasts of its likely development⁹

In their article “Cherez nastoiashchee – v budushchee” published in *Voprosy Literatury*, Arkady and Boris Strugatsky confirm that point of view. In this article they define their method of studying reality in the following way: “*Into the present by way of the future!*”¹⁰ “This discreet manner in presenting ideological and sociological comments is necessary in a communist establishment, and is used by the Strugatsky in many of their social satires, as in *The Tale of Troika*, *The Second Martian Invasion*, *Hard to be God*, and *Prisoner of Power*.”¹¹

The Strugatskys began as utopian science fiction writers in the early sixties and the most significant thematic shift in their writing occurred at the beginning of the 60-s in the direction of political and social criticism of the present disguised as the future. This shift toward anti-utopia made Tamarchenko consider the Strugatskys as the forerunners of Soviet science fiction dystopia. (Glad, p.52)

Their basic literary technique in such anti-utopias is to juxtapose everyday reality with fantasy. Britikov made an interesting statement concerning fantasy in science

⁹ Bearne, Colin Gerald. “Soviet Science Fiction.” Vortex, London: Pan Books Ltd. p.22. 1971.

¹⁰ Voprosy Literatury, VIII p.73. 1964.

¹¹ Bearne, Colin Gerald. “Soviet Science Fiction.” Vortex, London: Pan Books Ltd. p.22. 1971.

fiction: Fantasy as a method is compatible with science fiction. Such a theory was created by the well-known writers, Arkady and Boris Strugatsky¹².

The Strugatskys emphasized this distinction saying that “the writer of fantasy utilizes methods which are not employed by realistic writers.”¹³ Furthermore, the Strugatskys’ uniqueness lies in the way they took the model of science fiction writing from the West and transformed it to the Soviet reality. The short stories written by the Strugatskys were different from Western science fiction prose: the characters in their books were human-like and very accurately depicted – they were all intellectual and kind people.

It is important that Soviet science fiction differs from Western Science fiction as it concerns man and the future. Soviet science fiction views science as essential for man’s progress, whereas Western science fiction science is seen as a threat, a destructive force that produces global catastrophes. Soviet man in Soviet science fiction is not afraid of the future, as he is very powerful.

John Peter Glad noted that once Soviet science fiction writers had experimented with a new technical theme they began to test the limits of the new permissiveness by branching out into “social criticism”. Such literature is more commentary on the Soviet reality than a description of the future.¹⁴

¹² Britikov, Anatolii. “Soviet Science Fiction Novel.” p.18.

¹³ Glad, John Peter. “Russian Soviet Science Fiction and Related Critical Activity.” Ann Arbor: Michigan University Microfilms. New York University PhD Dissertation. p.331. 1971.

¹⁴ Glad, John Peter. “Russian Soviet Science Fiction and Related Critical Activity.” Ann Arbor: Michigan University Microfilms. New York University PhD Dissertation. p.331. 1971.

Many literary qualities stand out in the Strugatsky works. One of their outstanding qualities is humor – cutting, razor-sharp satire, their bold, social commentary, especially when made in fantasy, puts them in a class by themselves. Bearne noted that when he wrote: “The Brothers Strugatskys are concerned essentially with people in a society. They explode the actions of their characters against a background which is fictional yet has tantalizing, pervasive echoes of a kind of reality” (Bearne, SSF Vortex, p.7) Fair enough, some of their best works have been satires, particularly anti-utopias. “Arkady and Boris Strugatsky are the prime movers in this revival of the anti-utopia.”¹⁵

Brief Overview of the Main Themes in the Strugatskys’ Works

The first novellas and short stories by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky were written between 1958 and 1962 and belong to their early phase, where they were writing in the optimistic spirit of the “thaw” generation. The early “typical” hero of the Strugatskys’ science fiction is a believer in the power of Reason; specifically, in its application towards scientific progress and education of the masses. These heroes of Khrushchev period are champions of a new, more rational society – one which finally achieve the humanistic socialist goals that were betrayed by Stalin’s “Cult of Personality.” The Strugatskys’ early phase coincides with the first half of the 1960s, their optimistic scientists heroes reflect the optimism of the scientific intelligentsia favored by the Khrushchev reforms.

¹⁵ Glad, John Peter. “Russian Soviet Science Fiction and Related Critical Activity.” Ann Arbor: Michigan University Microfilms. New York University PhD Dissertation. p.120. 1971.

The most representative of this period is their first short story, *Six Matches* that was published in 1958. *Six Matches* is the story about a scientist who risks his life and sanity by experimenting with neutrino beams directed at his own brain. On the verge of developing superhuman powers, he suffers a mental breakdown. From his notes and the evidence of his lab assistant it became clear that the scientists collapsed while attempting to lift a bundle of six matches via telekinesis. In this story the Strugatskys show Soviet scientists' devotion to work and unconditional passion for progress to the extent that they are ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of progress. These ideas are also reflected in a number of their later works, one of them being *Monday begins on Saturday*, a satirical anti-utopia, where scientists are so involved in their projects that do not suspend their work on New Year's eve. The novel is full of humor, ironic wit, and eccentricities.

Noon, 22nd Century or Polden', XXII vek (1962) depicts utopian communist reigns on Earth. The novel makes fun of the future with its pesky working robots and malfunctioning automated kitchens. Robots cannot be smarter than man. In the novel the robots are friendly and humorous. They discuss questions concerning the meaning and purpose of life. Despite the robots and automation in this futuristic novel, life of people is not carefree.

In all of the Strugatskys' novels it is possible to find several common themes: in satires and fantasies the Strugatskys attack mostly bureaucracy and mock Soviet attitude to work; they write about progress and about the extraterrestrial civilizations that cause a potential threat to mankind if explored and revealed. They show that people are responsible for the life and future of the planet Earth and they see future in children.

The first remarkable novels which marked the beginning of the new phase were written after 1962: *Far Rainbow* (1963) and *Hard to be a God* (1964). These novels signified a shift from utopian period to anti-utopian.

In the novel *Far Rainbow* (1963) or *Dalekaya Raduga*, the main theme is the youth, symbolically Soviet youth. In this novel the Captain Gorbovsky takes charge and heroically sacrifices himself for the children. He says: “the most valuable thing we have is our future, and our future is the children.” (p.128)

Hard to be a God (1964) is a sociological novel, acclaimed by Russian critics as the best utopian novel of Soviet literature.¹⁶ It serves as an analogy on the Stalin era: Don Reba in the novel is a Stalin-like character. The Tower of Joy is symbolic of the “sanitariums” in the Soviet Union for “mental patients.” There is a satire on bureaucracy as well when Revolutionary monks act like bureaucrats after they assume control – with their numerous forms and petitions.

Monday begins on Saturday (1965) or *Ponedel'nik nachinaetsa v Subbotu*, can be interpreted as a sociological fantasy with the central themes of useless research and oppressive, inefficient bureaucracy lie beneath the cover of humor and satire. Its sequel *Tale of Troika* is also written in a humorous manner, but is in fact a classical satire on bureaucracy where the oppressive bureaucracy is viewed as very pessimistic. The Epilogue speaks about the apathy and lack of consideration of bureaucracy, its abuse of power, greed, and corruptness. “He (the Head of the Troika) does no thinking himself, and doesn't let others do it either.” (p.244)

¹⁶ Rottensteiner, Franz. “Science Fiction Book.” p.122.

The Final Circle of Paradise (1965) or another English title is *Predatory Things of Our Times*, in Russian known as *Khishchnye veschi veka*, is a social commentary on science fiction, utopia, alcoholism, drug culture and narcissistic society, TV programming – the full spectrum of society's ills. Also the Strugatskys satirize their favorite enemy – bureaucracy.

The Snail on the Slope (1965) or *Unitka na sklone* is a vicious mockery of Soviet bureaucracy and the novel has a parallel with the oppressive Nazi regime.

In *The Ugly Swans* (1972) or *Gadkie Lebedi*, the setting is in an imaginary Western country, however it is easy to recognize the features of Stalin in its president, a former freedom fighter who has become a brutal tyrant, suppressing freedom of speech and silencing or destroying intellectuals. The main protagonist of the book, Viktor Banev speaks for the disillusioned Soviet intelligentsia in this novel:

Portraits in all newspapers, in all textbooks, plastered on every wall – the face that had once seemed admirable and full of significance and now become flaccid and dumb, like a pig's snout with a giant, fanged, drooling maw (*The Ugly Swans*, p.87).

However, among the oppression, passivity and fear emerges a new generation of spiritual supermen: the children of the future, cleansed of vice and weaknesses by the “spectacles” disease (in Russian-“egghead”). This novel has its major themes – values of different generations, hippie movement and mentality, relations between fathers and sons, and the climax theme is the Apocalypse: the structure and the values of the present civilization are discredited, but the new arising civilization that consists of the “children

of the future” is absolutely alien, but the children are the future. In *The Snail on the Slope* and *The Ugly Swans* the happy ending excludes humanity.

The Second Martian Invasion (1967) or *Vtoroe Nashestvie Marsian*, is a social satire on the Soviet regime as the Martians– ruthless, but progressive - symbolize the Bolsheviks. As in their earlier work *Hard to be a God* (1964) the Strugatskys bring up the theme of accommodation and non-resistance to Martians.

The Inhabited Island (1969) also known as *Prisoners of Power* (*Obitaemyi Ostrov*) depicts people whose minds are controlled by government network of electronic transmitters. The theme of “brainwashing” could have been dynamite in the Soviet Union and, as Glad observes, “In spite of the evidently considerable work of the censor’s scissors, the hidden text still gleams through in spots.”¹⁷ It is an anti-utopia novel, a grim picture of civilization controlled by powerful doses of radiation. Maxim, the main character, struggles against tyranny; he never loses confidence in himself and humanity. *The Inhabited Island* is a thinly disguised attack on Stalinism.¹⁸ The theme of oppression dominates the plot and the aftereffects of holocaust are described: the Strugatskys depict strange distorted people – a young girl mutant, Monkey, is later seen in the daughter of the main protagonist in *Roadside Picnic* (1972).

Roadside Picnic (1972) also known as *Piknik na Obochine*, where the main protagonist, Red Schuhart, is a “stalker” who spends most of his time in the forbidden zone abandoned by aliens where Golden Ball is located that fulfills all the wishes. There

¹⁷ Glad, John Peter. “Russian Soviet Science Fiction and Related Critical Activity.” Ann Arbor: Michigan University Microfilms. New York University PhD Dissertation. p.121. 1971.

¹⁸ Rottensteiner, Franz. “Science fiction Book” p.122.

are also satirical social comments about inefficient workers and inefficiency in the Institute. The main theme is that the scientific advances can be dangerous if used for greedy purposes and that science is not always a panacea for man's illnesses. Dr.

Valentine Pilman says:

The possibility that in pulling all these chestnuts out of the fire, we may pull out something that will make life impossible not only for us, but for the entire planet, is a threat that always hovers over mankind. Human psychology may not be adaptable to future technology (p.100).

Also the theme of brutal policy system, reminiscent of KGB, is strong throughout the narrative.

Definitely Maybe or *Zailliardy let do kontsa sveta* (1977) involves five scientists whose work is being impeded by unknown mysterious forces, possibly alien super civilization. The scientists chose not to resist the opponents of the progress. Another theme that can be found in the novel is the theme of scientists' responsibility for their inventions: some inventions can be harmful and people are not ready to handle the problems caused by their new scientific inventions. That puts the life of the human kind at stake. The most recent example can be the nuclear power plant that has been damaged by the earthquake and tsunami in Fukushima, Japan in March 2011, where the radiation levels exceed the legal limit. Nuclear weapons and power has been long developed by scientists in Japan and in a number of other countries but the truth is that people do not know how to sustain the harmful effects if something goes wrong with their inventions. People are not prepared for the unintended terrible circumstances which can cause massive ecological destruction and death.

The Doomed City (1975) or *Grad Obrechennyi*, the city in which the novel takes place is located in the afterlife: the main character starts his spiritual journey after his death. The city's social and political culture is clearly modeled on elements of Soviet totalitarianism. The main theme is animosity between rural and urban workers, bureaucrats, and the ruling elite. It depicts a catastrophic decline in cultural and linguistic norms.

The Inhabited Island (1969), *The Beetle in the Anthill* (1980) or *Zhuk v muraveinike*, and *The Time Wanderers* (another English title is *The Waves Still the Wind*), (1986) or *Volny gasiat veter* form a trilogy where the main character is Maxim Krammer, a Progressor hero. *The Beetle in the Anthill* (1980) or *Zhuk v muraveinike*, “negates and contradicts much of the spirit of the works that came before it.”¹⁹ Patrick McGuire has pointed out “we suddenly made aware of a mania for secrecy in the Strugatsky future society... The only object of this secrecy can be to keep information out of the hands of the public – a public that has enjoyed full communism for two-and –a-half centuries.” Finally, in the last novel of the trilogy, *The Time Wanderers*, the motif of Progressorism reaches a dead-end. By the year 2299, not only does the Earth society apparently rejects its former heroes, but the ex-Progressors renounce themselves.

Burdened with Evil (1988) or *Otiagoshchennye Zlom*, has multiple themes: Good and Evil in humans, evil versus “pure spirit” and Second Advent of Jesus Christ.

¹⁹ McGuire, Patrick. “Future History, Soviet Style in Critical Encounters” ed. Tom Staicer. New York, p.121. 1982.

Literature Overview

Soviet science fiction, especially the works of the Strugatsky brothers have quite a few sources with literary criticism. The interest of Western critics to the Russian science fiction is impressively big. Though most of criticism can be found from Russian sources there exist a number of Western critics who devoted their research to the science fiction novels written by Arkady and Boris Strugatskys.

The Soviet critics who were in favor of the Strugatskys' style were Britikov, Gromova and Brandis. Their most famous Western colleagues were Darko Suvin, Patrick McGuire, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Yvonne Howell, Rafail Nudelman and Stephen Potts.

It should be noted that the concepts of Socialist Realism and fantasy in Soviet science fiction divided Soviet writers and critics in two camps, conservative and liberal. The conservatives viewed Soviet science fiction as an ideological tool of the Communist party. They favored a "realistic" approach and utilization of Soviet science fiction for political and scientific propaganda; they opposed description of highly unusual events, creatures or inventions and disapproved of any dependency on foreign science fiction. (Glad, p.52) Their liberal opponents such as Gromova and Nudelman saw Soviet science fiction as a means of freeing Soviet literature from the frames of Socialist Realism, they viewed themselves as "Westernizers" whose task was to aid Soviet science fiction to join the ranks of more advanced foreign writers and they welcomed the rebirth of anti-utopia, while the conservatives opposed it. The liberals believed Arkady and Boris Strugatsky had exemplary artistic ability. (Glad, p.52) Soviet literary journal, *Voprosy Literatury* recognized this opposition of opinions:

To a considerable extent recent Soviet science fiction can be viewed as an anti-realistic movement aimed at overthrowing the official doctrine of Socialist Realism. Arkady and Boris Strugatsky place a virtual equal sign between science fiction and fantasy, and suggest that “scientific” could be eliminated from the generic term.²⁰

John Peter Glad who wrote his PhD dissertation on Soviet science fiction in New York University wrote:

Realism has enjoyed an unnaturally long reign in Russia and is being found inadequate by a greater number of Soviet readers. The exodus of Soviet science fiction writers into fantasy and mythology is being hailed by a number of critics and is met enthusiastically by the reading public (Glad, p.25).

When in 1970s Strugatskys’ books started to be widely translated, academic critics in the West began to direct their attention to the Strugatsky brothers. Darko Suvin, a Slavist from Montreal published several bibliographical articles on Strugatskys’ fiction. Circa 1980 academic editors and publishers made arrangements for a number of studies and essay collections concerning the Strugatskys. Articles on specific topics have appeared in a range of other scholarly venues; 1986, for instance, a discussion by Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., in *Science Fiction Studies*, discussing the Strugatsky brothers’ use of fairy-tale motifs and a feminist critique by Diana Greene of the *Snail on the Slope* in *Modern Fiction Studies*.

²⁰ Voprosy Literaturny, VIII p.73. 1964.

As Potts notes “dominant Western view was that the Strugatsky were officially in disfavor with the Brezhnev government, and the proof to it is the fact that Soviet government banned the reprinting of their novel (for example, *The Snail on the Slope*) in the USSR.” The Strugatskys used science fiction as a means of veiled criticism of the Soviet government. Some considered the Strugatsys dissidents, because they have done an excellent job of concealing their desire to overthrow the Soviet system.²¹ Great Soviet Encyclopedia while noted that many of their works, such as *The Snail on the Slope*, “aroused criticism and polemics in the press”, still concluded that the Strugatsky brothers defend the humanist ideal of progress, reflecting on the role of the individual in the society and on the man’s responsibility for the future” (v.24, p.605)

²¹ Potts, Stephen. “The Second Marxian Invasion: The Fiction of the Strugatsky Brothers.” San-Bernardino: The Borgo Press. p.17. 1991.

CHAPTER II

THE OVERVIEW OF THE MAJOR WORKS

The Final Circle of Paradise

In the 60-s Arkady and Boris Strugatskys' works began to emphasize the obstacles of achieving utopia. In their works before 1964, not only were described the victory of the socialist revolution and terrestrial utopia, but the whole space was conceived as a scene where the only problems facing humanity are the struggles with nature and contacts with other species.²²

With *The Final Circle of Paradise* (1965), the Strugatskys brought their settings and situations closer to social settings on the planet Earth, compared to their earlier works written before 1964, and to ethical-psychological dilemmas posed by complex social situations. *The Final Circle of Paradise* takes place on the Earth, in a resort area in an imaginary Country of the Fools which mimics Western consumer society. With these more concrete settings, the Strugatskys also began to pay more attention to the problems encountered by their scientific adventurers and less to the heroic solutions. (Potts, 37)

The novel *Predatory Things of Our Times* which appears in English translation as *The Final Circle of Paradise* describes only three days of Ivan Zhilin's investigation. The main protagonist Ivan Zhilin, a space ship engineer is sent to the Earth as a secret agent, dressed as a tourist. He is sent to the resort area to find out what causes the degeneracy of the society and what happened to the two previous agents sent before him. The resort area is a place of that conceals the boredom and spiritual malaise of its populace. To fill their

²² Potts, Stephen. "The Second Marxian Invasion: The Fiction of the Strugatsky Brothers." San-Bernardino: The Borgo Press. p.17. 1991.

empty lives people there seek cheap thrills that the city offers, such as abandoned subway where people pay to experience a life-and-death chase with a crazed robot. All values have been reduced to the service of hedonism, including those of science and technology. Even stranger and more sinister is the popularity of the “shivers” (“drozhki”), a form of mass hysteria urged by the direct electronic stimulation of the pleasure centers of the brain. Along similar lines, but more deadly in its effects, is “slug,” a blend of electronic and chemical stimulation that has the side-effect of slowly destroying its users, much like heroin.

Zhilin’s job is to find the causes and, if possible, the people behind the degeneracy of the society. Two previous secret agents Peck and Rimeyer have succumbed to the electronic narcotic, Peck has become the major dealer in “slug” and Rimeyer is hopelessly addicted to it. Out of curiosity and for better understanding what he is dealing with, Zhilin tries the slug himself. He finds it an escape from every day routine, but is not converted to it. It does, however, help him reach the surprising conclusion that no particular set of individuals is responsible for the spiritual decline of this culture: the responsibility lies with all people and the unfortunately all-too-human blend of inventiveness and self-centered sensuality. Ironically, his direct superiors refuse to accept his findings, insisting that “if there is a crime, there must be a criminal.”

This utopian science fiction novel presents a full spectrum of society faults: alcoholism, the drug-culture and modern narcissistic society.

In the novel human weakness together with boredom, materialism, selfishness, hedonism may be referenced to gangsterism and fascism. Two elusive texts are mentioned in the novel: *History of Fascism* and *Sociology of Decaying Structures*. In this

society, abundance and affluence have become ends in themselves instead of becoming the means to a better world.

In the novel Zhilin discusses with Rimeyer his idea of purpose of human life, and social progress, arguing that humans have to interact in order to produce genuine social progress. Rimeyer insists that progress in the form of science and technology has produced slug, which can provide every individual with a personal paradise without much effort. Slug fulfills the illusion of material and spiritual well-being.

Zhilin concludes that "Slug" represents "the end of progress." If the "Slug" is widely known, people in masses would start getting addicted to it and it would mean an ultimate destroy of mankind:

"You can't replace life with dreams. People who escape into this illusory world cease to exist in the real world. They become as dead, and when everyone enters the illusory world – the history of man will terminate." (p.151)

The key to salvation for Zhilin from the end is education. He opposed his superiors' solution to isolate the city from the rest of the world. He feels that "they can return to people their souls which had been devoured by affluence, and to teach each one to think of world problems in the same way as his own personal ones" (DAW, 1976; p.196-170) Eventually, Zhilin decides that if he cannot save everyone, but he can at least save the boy, Len Tuur, he has become friends with. The boy is horrified by the surroundings and is trying to make sense of the chaos in his generation. He is the only one in the novel worth saving thus the Strugatskys show that the future lies in children.

Several Soviet critics found this work flawed on ideological grounds: the novel offers the vision of humanity only too willing to be corrupted by abundance, affluence

and mere pleasure. One of the novel themes is to show Zhilin's desperate hope to improve the state of humanity. From the perspective of nineties, the novel is foreshadowing the American "cyberpunk" movement of the mid-eighties when society was overwhelmed with drugs, electronic stimulation of the nervous system, and mass media manipulation. The driving purpose of that time for everyone was wealth and the pleasure it could buy, followed by moral degradation. This message is explicit in *The Final Circle of Paradise*.

This novel is a good example of the Strugatskys' ability to foresee the main tendencies in the society. They sensed and described the social tendencies twenty years before they came to Russia. Their prophecy is the major reason why intelligentsia and dissidents admired them and critics hailed with negative criticism and the Soviet government banned publication of some of their books.

Hard to Be God

Hard to be God literally translated from Russian title *Trudno byt' Bogom*, is the novel that is considered the Strugatsky's best by many critics; it appeared in 1964 just before the novel *The Final Circle of Paradise*. It also concerns the issue of human nature and human faults but here the Strugatskys go further in exploring the problem of the autonomy of historical development and the justification of intervention. In this novel the intervention in the other planet's history is necessary in order to put it on the proper road to progress. This novel can be named the Strugatskys' master work on this subject. *Hard*

to be God became the most popular work of the Strugatsky brothers in the Soviet Union and in the sixties the most popular work of science fiction by any author.

The main theme of the novel echoes with Isaac Asimov's novel *The End of Eternity* where he also make the main theme the forceful spreading of the progress despite the sacrifices it can take in order to change the structure of the government.

The main protagonist, Anton Don Rumata is a member of a team from the Institute of Experimental History is sent from communist Earth to an alien planet to study their human life.

The alien world in this novel is a copy of the Earth but in earlier stages of history – Dark Ages. The Earthmen of the future, Anton and his team represent more advanced forms of humanity with their wisdom, ethics and various skills. They came from the humankind that recognizes the brutal, miserable and short-sighted creatures who inhabit the world of the novel and try to confront them. Anton's people come from the utopian Earth where all the problems they confront on the adopted planet have long ceased to exist.

This planet is passing through a feudal stage of history. The society is degenerating into fascism and it reminds of the time of Inquisition on Earth. In this feudal land of Arkanar all the power is concentrated in the hands of the leader Don Reba who implements tremendous power of terror. However, he is supported by the rising class of shopkeepers, who are suspicious of the old intelligentsia and aristocracy and wish to destroy both. They are in their turn supported by the Church and the night army of the underworld bandit leader Waga Koleso. Here we have the bourgeois, cleric and gangster union that aim at eradicating the enlightenment that would facilitate the transition from

feudalism through capitalism to the communist world state, “a society free of all class distinctions and the oppression of man,” in Rumata’s words. Rumata and his comrades from the Institute of Experimental History have to follow the Institute’s code that ban direct intervention in the affairs of the planet. Nevertheless, he feels compelled to do whatever he can to prevent injustice on the planet and to save the society from the political injustice. As he grew to love this planet and a native woman, Kira, he feels more attached to the planet than he should be as an outside investigator. Rumata is an educated Earthman and at the same time a passionate Arkanarian – and this conflict in his character gives depth and complexity to the story.²³ The tension in Rumata’s character is the central to the plot of the novel, narrative focuses on Rumata’s confrontations with enemies, and with his own increasing impulses towards violence. At some point he realizes that his humanity has suffered some change and he openly despises his enemies. On this planet Anton is degenerating because there is no place for enlightened individual as this place is full of evil creatures and corrupt leaders. In the book there is a discussion between Rumata and Doctor Budach about what God should do in order to make the best world for human beings. Budach suggests providing all people the necessities of life, while Rumata argues that even after that the strong and powerful will continue to take from the weak. Doctor suggests educating cruel rulers, Rumata says that educated rulers would be replaced by crueler and stronger men. The picture of the world that Rumata eventually draws is the one where the strong incessantly oppress the weak, the world

²³ The World of Arkanar in the Strugatskys’ novel *Hard to be God* reminds of the word of Pandora in the film *Avatar* (2009) directed by James Cameron. Russian critics claim that James Cameron borrowed liberally, if not outright stolen, the story from a popular science fiction series *Noon: 22nd Century* written by the Strugatsky Brothers.

produces greed and apathy and the only way to human happiness is to “wipe this mankind off the face of the Earth and create another in its place.”

Rumata does not understand why Doctor Budach, with his intellect and wisdom, remains so hopelessly passive. “Why do you permit yourself to be thrown into prison” Rumata asks. “Why do you accept you fate and let yourselves be burnt at the stake? Why do you separate the search for new knowledge from the practical demands of life, the fight against all evil?” (p.182) The theme of non-resistance to evil and abuse is one of the major themes. This theme of passiveness is further exemplified by Kira when Rumata tells her: “Victims. Unnecessary victims. Senseless. For people like you are no fighters. In order to be a fighter one has to be able to hate and this is exactly what you cannot do.” (p.200)

However, the Strugatskys leave a glimmer of hope: in Arkanar mankind is not inherently evil, but prone to evil. Rumata observes a ten-year-old prince of Arkanar and the child along with other children Rumata has met in this country “showed absolutely no trace of meanness”. But he thinks that these children will later develop into ignorant citizens, blindly serving the authorities. He thinks that these children “are not yet human beings in the current sense of the word, but rather preliminary stages, blocks of raw iron ore out of which the bloody centuries of history will eventually forge proud and free men” (p.131).

The power of environment to shape or destroy the human spirit is demonstrated most dramatically in the novel’s climax. The vicious monks of the Holy Order try to indirectly provoke Rumata to start a war by attacking the home of his beloved Kira. They end up killing her, so Rumata, seeking for revenge takes a sword ready to fight.

The main narrative in this novel is framed by Prologue and Epilogue. Both of them are set in the Russian countryside of the future utopian Earth and features Anton Don Rumata, and two of his friends: Pashka (Don Hug on the other planet) and Anka. In Prologue we learn that Anton had suffered a breakdown and massacred the monks on the other planet. The Institute of Experimental History had immediately taken Anton off the planet and returned him to the Russian woods for a long, gradual recovery.

Monday Begins on Saturday

Following the success of *Hard to be God* and *The Final Circle of Paradise*, the Strugatskys' fiction veered away from political economics. The period 1965-1968 saw four works produced that abandon realistic and futuristic modes to tread the boundaries of fantasy and satire. They also touch the themes of human institutions, human nature, and the application of science, but they present it in a whimsical and surreal way.

Since the beginning of their career in late 50s, the Strugatskys have explored in their science fiction the contradictory relationship between the utopianism implicit in the fairy tale and the critical rationalism implicit in science. (Csicsery-Ronay, p.1)

Strugatskys are credited for the Soviet's first science fantasy, the *Monday Begins on Saturday* trilogy.

The closest to traditional Russian fairy tale motifs is the trilogy: *Ponedel'nik nachinaesta v subbotu*, or *Monday begins of Saturday*. This 1965 novel portrays a research facility far in the mystical Russian North, the Scientific Research Secret Institute of Witchcraft and Black Magic (NII CHAVO), where the techniques of modern science

and ancient magic freely blend. Alexander Privalov, the main protagonist, is a computer programmer, who is invited to work in this institution. Privalov meets a talking cat and a talking fish, sees strange devices like a “translator” sofa, an “unspendable” coin, and a talking mirror.

The mixture of the modern and the mystical remains a recurring motif throughout the book. Quasi-rational explanations are offered for nearly all the magic things in this novel. When Privalov discovers a magic wand under a piece of furniture, a figure in a gray suit appears and warns him against using it without proper scientific background and technical training. Similarly, a sofa with mysterious properties turns out to be a transistorized ‘translator’ with an invisible on-off switch in its springs. The entire book abounds with such touches: the fusion and confusion of technology and magic is its longest running joke.

Various departments of the research center have absurd titles that match their objectives: Linear Happiness, Meaning of Life, Defensive Magic, Universal Transformations, and so on. Despite the fantasy orientation, satire dominates this novel and some of it is cutting, especially that pertaining to bureaucracy – “Every positive suggestion had been turned down for the lack of funds” (p.99), and Department of Eternal Youth had no youth – just a thousand year oldsters suffering from sclerosis. The ultimate scientific charlatan, Ambrosi Vybegallo is the head of the Department of Absolute Knowledge. He is a humorous inefficient administrator and everyone under his authority wastes time:

Some of the colleagues were constantly busying themselves by dividing zero by zero on their desk calculators, while others were requesting assignments in Infinity. From there they returned looking energetic and well fed and immediately took leaves of absence for reasons of health (p.103).

Vybegallo is also known as a scandalous scientist, prone to grandstanding for the media and creating useless or harmful experiments. He is engaged in hatching the ideal man, working up to him in stages such as “Man, unsatisfied stomach-wise.” This particular model is consummate consumer, who swallows tons of food during Vybegallo’s demonstration of the axiom of happiness comes from the satisfaction of the physical wants. After the model consumer explodes in the shower of filth, Vybegallo conjures up on the next stage of perfect humanity, the “superegocentrist.” This model eats everything material and warps time and space around itself, so it had to be destroyed.

Privalov notices the dedication of the most men at the Institute, men who “could not stand any kind of Sunday, because they were bored on Sunday, their motto was ‘Monday begins on Saturday’” (DAW, 1977; p.116) Here, curiously, Privalov praises mere pursuit – the search for human happiness, absolute knowledge, and the meaning of life.

Yvonne Howell singles out in her book “Apocalyptic Realism” that the novel *Monday begins on Saturday* depicted the “new man” of their generation at work: enthusiastic young scientists defying both the backwardness of their technology and the rigidity of Soviet bureaucracy with marvelous results.

One of the best sequences is a take-off on time travel that turns into a satire of the entire science fiction genre. Privalov volunteers to board the experimental time machine

that looks like an automobile but the vehicle turns out to have clutch problems. Another drawback is that it can only visit fictional futures, those depicted in the science fiction of East and West. On this time machine he travels back to find the future and he travels though medieval times up to the twentieth century. He sees a gray wall which can be identified with the Iron Curtain and sees men in union suits marching and singing to Marxist hymns, followed by space travelers leaving *en masse* to carry the revolution to the stars while their women go into deep freeze in Pantheon-Refrigerator to wait for their spacefaring men. Then Privalov returns back to his present.

Another amusing and mysterious touch to the novel adds the Janus Nevstruev, who is actually a two individual person in one: Janus-A, a young, efficient administrator, who likes to keep things in order, and Janus-U, an older scientist and a genius who turns up periodically amid his research into parallel universes. The most tricking fact about Janus-U is his secure knowledge of the near future but a total ignorance of the recent past. He simultaneously travels back and forth in time.

According to Potts, the book is loose and episodic, as in a fantasy/satire, the characters are two dimensional, essentially identified by single traits: the naïve Privalov, the rude Viktor Korneev, the polite Eddie Amperian, the dashing Cristobal Junta, etc. The novel is very entertaining and serves a good parody on Soviet reality where scientists devote all their time to work that essentially does not guarantee any progress and is mostly just a waste of time. The novel lacks depth of some earlier works like *Hard to be God*. In addition, much of the cultural tradition – the folklore, the satirical stereotypes, and so on – does not translate well.

In 1968 the Strugatskys published a sequel of the novel *Monday begins on Saturday*, named “*Skazka o Troike*” – “*Tale of the Troika*”. The work is a considerably shorter and is primarily a satire on the abuses of science and bureaucracy. The novelette typifies the Bad Administrator who uses the power only for his own interests. Here the Strugatskys are aiming at Soviet bureaucracy in particular and the book can be taken as a wholesale criticism of the communist system. The Strugatskys are talking about the failure of a human being to be truly human, of people’s selfishness and stupidity. They criticize human weakness and show that the environment proves to be the strongest influence on man’s nature and decisions. In the end of the story Privalov is going to compete for a higher salary with his colleagues in order to gain the favor of Vuniukov and earn more money. The conclusion is open ended so that readers could reflect on the morality: it is extremely difficult to erase the human propensity for selfishness and vice. What was true in *Hard to be God* is true in the much different setting of *Tale of the Troika*; no matter how strong one’s convictions and values are, they can only function properly in a like milieu. The individual is largely at the mercy of his social surroundings. The novelette has moments of genuine humor and incisive wit, it is merely clever and playful but as *Monday begins on Saturday* it should be approached on its own. However, the book *Monday begins on Saturday* is well within the boundaries of Soviet popular culture, with its Russian folklore and satire aiming at Soviet reality. If compared to the rest of science fiction novels written by the Strugatskys, this trilogy stands out on its own with its abundance of satire and sharp humor.

The Snail on the Slope

The Strugatsky's novel of 1968, *Ulitka na sklone* – *The Snail on the Slope* – is in many respects the consummate fable that combines the mad atmosphere and fantastic images of the Privalov stories with a careful construction and complex ideas of their earlier stories, like *Hard to be God*.

It first appeared as two separate short novels in separate years and separate journals. Chapters two, four, seven, eight, and eleven of the complete novel were published in the anthology “Ellinskii Sekret” in 1966. Chapters one, three, five, nine, and ten were published in the Siberian journal “Baikal” two years later. The later part, in particular, was subject to hostile criticism from ideologically conservative critics. The publication was withdrawn, and for many years versions of the *Snail on the Slope* circulated only in *samizdat* copies. In this novel the Strugatskys departed from their straight-forward, adventure style format. The novel was perceived to be more “surreal” than “science fiction” and more Kafka-like style. And it is the only novel that has provoked, at least in the West, a well-argued feminist rebuttal.²⁴

The novel presents the stories of two protagonists Pepper and Kandid, who never actually meet. Both are intellectuals who mistakenly arrive into the world of the novel from something referred to as “the Mainland”. Since the action of the novel takes place a surrealistic, dystopian world, the Mainland represents, by implication, empirical reality and humanistic culture: a point of reference according to which the protagonists struggle –at first- to orient themselves.

²⁴ Greene, Diana. “Male and Female in the Snail on the Slope,” *Modern Fiction Studies*, vol.2, no.1. p.107. 1986.

The world depicted in *The Snail on the Slope* is divided into two tales or antagonistic realms: the realm of the Forest, and the realm of the Administration. These two tales proceed on parallel courses in alternating chapters. In the first chapter we meet the main character of the first story – Pepper, a young artist-intellectual caught within the confines of a bureaucracy called the Administration.

Administration is a male-dominated bureaucracy full of red tape devoted to studying the Forest. Its aim is to eradicate the nearby Forest and create a park suitable for civilization. Pepper, however, loves the Forest and dreams of going there one day, but he cannot get a permission to enter the forest. He feels trapped, because he also cannot return back home to “the Mainland.”

The second chapter introduces the main character of the second story – Kandid, who lives in the Forest. The Strugatskys gave their character Kandid a symbolic name, taken from the eighteenth century satirical novella by François Voltaire “Candide”. In this novella a young man, Candide, is living a sheltered life in a forest and slowly becomes disillusioned with the doctrine of Leibnizian optimism and starts advocating the enigmatic precept, “we must cultivate our garden”. In this novella Voltaire raises the acute social problems of his times: problem of evil, and ridicules religion, governments, armies, philosophies, and philosophers and assaults Leibniz and his optimism. In many ways the Strugatskys’ novel *The Snail on the Slope* echoes the problems and themes in the Voltaire’s novella.

So Kandid in the Strugatskys’ novel lives in the Forest, but he used to work for the Administration, however, he lost his memory during the helicopter crash and now he is trapped in a primitive, provincial village in the Forest. He wants to escape from the

Forest but he cannot find anyone courageous enough to go with him through the Forest maze full of danger. The Forest is ruled by a female society called Accession.

For Pepper, the forest embodies the meaning of life, for the Administration “the meaning of life does not exist, nor does the meaning of action” (p.81, unpublished Bantam edition). The Administration is not truly interested in understanding the Forest, or life or anything else. Instead, it is “fond of so-called simple solutions, libraries, internal communications, geographical and other maps” (p.82). Like any other bureaucracy, its function is self-perpetuation:

Just as the highway can't turn as it pleases to left or right, but has to follow the optical axis of your theodolite, just so every directive must be a continuation of all those preceding it.... Sweetie, don't probe into it, I don't understand anything about it myself, but that's good really, because probing stirs up doubts, doubts make people mark time, and marking time is the death of the administrative activity, consequently the death of you, me and everyone. . . . "That's simple. Not a single day without a directive and everything will be all right. This Directive on procedure, now--it doesn't exist in vacuum, it's tied up with the preceding Directive on non-absence, and that was linked with the Order on non-pregnancy, and that Order flowed logically from the Injunction on excessive indignation, and that . . . (The Snail on the Slope, 119).

The Administration issues Orders that make little or no sense in order to keep everyone busy and make people do some work even if it was not needed. People, like robots, follow the directives and that’s the only way to rule the society.

Pepper and Kandid seem to mirror and complement each other. Pepper goes through a long and painful process of endless red tape and bureaucracy, and finally gets the permission to enter the Forest. The bureaucracy stands between the protagonist and the ultimate understanding that he seeks.

When Pepper reaches the Forest, he is disappointed: he finds the Forest “nauseating.” His reaction is not unexpected, as we already learn from Kandid that the life in the Forest is oppressive and overwhelming. Life here means, ambiguously, not only the growth and reproduction but the death and decay. Pepper becomes disillusioned with the Forest and the Administration and he wants to be far away from both. We also learn about Kandid’s quest when he finally decides to escape the Forest. As travelling, he encounters strange scenes: a warm lake with naked women swimming in it, a fog-covered hill that produces wave after wave full of insects and monsters. Shortly after, he meets the Accession – the Maidens. They are the women who have the absolute power on the Forest, these women have no use of men and they reproduce in their own mysterious way. The goal of their Accession is nothing less than the gradual eradication of male – dominated civilization.

Pepper returns back to the Administration to discover that he has been appointed the director of Administration. Instead of blindly following the rules and continuing the political line of previous directors, he makes an attempt to understand its activity:

...maybe all this merry-go-round exists just for that--so everybody's kept busy? In fact a good mechanic can service a car in two hours. What happens after that? What about the other twenty-two hours? And what if in addition competent workers operate the machines so as to keep them in good shape? The answer's

right here: give a good mechanic a job of a cook, and turn the cook into a mechanic. That way you can fill twenty-two years, not mentioning hours. No, there was a certain logic in it. Everybody works, discharging their obligations to humanity... and they extend their specialization range... Anyhow, there's no logic at all there, it's a mess, that's all (The Snail on the Slope, 119).

Pepper goes against the rules and denies signing senseless directives. As I mentioned earlier the symbolism of Kandid's name, here we can see that Pepper's name is also symbolic. "Perets" in the Russian language, "Pepper" in English means spice that has its spicy heat. So Pepper's name describes him as a strong and resistant character able to oppose the existing oppressive bureaucratic regime. Unlike his predecessors, he tries to understand the Administration's structure and logic and he questions its directives and the benefit of the activity done by separate departments created in the Administration:

Forest Eradication Group, Forest Research Group, Forest Military Guard, Assistance to Native Population Group. .. ." What else was there? Yes! "Engineering Penetration Group." Yes, and "Science Security Group." So, what did they all do? Odd, but I've never wondered up till now what they all do here...How is it possible to combine forest eradication with a forest guard, and assist the local populations at the same time... (The Snail on the Slope, 119).

Finally, frustrated and powerless against this bureaucratic machine, Pepper instead of succumbing its rules, issues a more ridiculous and radical directive to make fun of the Administrative structure. But surprisingly, his directive is accepted and does not seem strange to others when he orders to eradicate Eradicators:

Well, let's say...let's say an order," said Pepper with extraordinary bitterness, "to the members of the Eradication Group to self-eradicate as soon as ever possible. Yes, indeed! Let them all throw themselves off the cliff...or shoot themselves...make it today! In charge - Hausbotcher. Now that really is something more useful..." "One moment," said Alevtina. "That is, to commit suicide using firearms today before midnight. In charge - Hausbotcher." She closed her notepad and...said. "It's all right. It's even more progressive. Sweetie, understand this: if you don't like a directive - don't worry about it. But make another one. That's what you've done and I have no more to ask of you (The Snail on the Slope, 119).

So the most ridiculous directive is approved and is going to be passed on to the people who will perform it, no matter if it is working on a project or throwing themselves off the cliff. The abstract above shows the society ruled by silly powerful people who do not have any aim, they work for the sake of work perpetuation and workers do too, so the directive will not seem even strange to them, because they will die for the sake of work.

Kandid in his turn returns back to the village to warn the inhabitants about the existence of the Accession and their possible danger, but he is only laughed at and nobody believes him and considers him to be a fool. Kandid does not give up and decides to lead his own personal war against the Accession.

It is interesting, that the hostile Soviet criticism of the novel was based on the assumption that the Administration depicted in the novel was a vicious mockery of Soviet bureaucracy. The Strugatskys' unfamiliar surrealistic style was perceived by many critics as an attempt to divert censors from the underlying anti-Soviet allegory. Western critics

also perceived the anti-Stalinist and anti-totalitarian slant, but rightfully attached a deeper meaning to the Forest and Administration imaginary than simply a political ruse to get past censorship.

According to Yvonne Howell, it was possible to see a topical political and ethical theme underlying the conflict of the two imaginary realms: Pepper's reaction to an overwhelming power structure could be interpreted as accommodation, whereas Kandid's refusal to capitulate – a heroic but futile gesture which marks him as a kind of “holy fool.” Both protagonists try to defend an ethical stance in modern power structures (depicted in the extreme), which has made their ethical principles practically obsolete. Furthermore, one can see Kandid and Pepper as representatives of Soviet intellectuals, caught between their fellow countrymen who mistrust them, and their government, which oppresses them. Another aspect of the novel which most critics seemed to have missed is the identification of the Forest realm with Nazi-style fascism. In fact, a comparison of Stalinism and Fascism overlays the symmetry of the novel's opposing male and female realms.

The Strugatskys chose a peculiar imagery to this novel. In her article “Male and Female in *The Snail on the Slope*” Diana Greene raised a question: “Why do the Strugatskys seem to equate the intellectual's struggle against an authoritarian state with men's struggle against overpowering women?” (Greene, 106) Her article speaks about the actual “war of the sexes between the patriarchal Administration and the matriarchal Forest.” Greene finds that the three women that rule the Forest embody the three female archetypes of the virgin, the mother, and the crone. Greene points out that the forest itself, as a geo-biological entity, is described in terms of a Female – a thoroughly

repulsive one. When Pepper visits the Forest, he discovers her revolving cesspools. The Strugatskys call the cesspool *matka* (womb), and its offspring are “whelped” like pups.

Moreover, Greene points out “all men in the novel relate to women in terms of one of three unhealthy patterns: they try to control women by degrading them, they allow women to prey upon them, forfeiting their souls and finally, they renounce women and avoid sexual relationships altogether (like Kandid does).” Howell suggests that it still remains to be explained why the Strugatskys depicts the individual’s struggle against the totalitarian state in terms of an unequal struggle between men and more powerful women. Howell in her book “Apocalyptic Realism” connects the actual political and social situation of women in the Soviet Union and offers Greene’s interpretation: “In a work exposing the oppression of Soviet society...one would expect to find women struggling against overpowering men...although much has been made of Soviet women’s supposed freedom, they have never enjoyed anything like men’s personal and political power” (Greene, 106) Howell suggests that this feminist interpretation leads to a paradox: the Strugatskys’ gendering of the forces of opposition seems to stand in contradiction to the political reality of women as an oppressed class in the Soviet Union. (Howell, 133)

The Forest environment has a specific political referent as Nazi Germany. There is much evidence in the text which points to concrete analogues between the Administration and Stalinism, and between the Forest and fascism. Kandid when made his journey into the heart of the Forest had to spend one night in a strange village where he saw the man Karl Etinghof he saw “a long strange building unlike any other in the Forest” and people wailing and saying goodbye to each other. Those people outside the building have escaped – they have not been included in the death list. According to

Howell, this dream has a direct connection with holocaust which has been a part of Kandid's experience on the Mainland. The fantastic, inhumane Forest and its unfathomable cruelty is linked to the real-life reference of Nazi Germany by the scene in the phantom village.

The Strugatskys attached all allusions to Nazi Germany at the biological "Über-Frauen" who rule the female realm of the Forest, rather than to the male-dominated Administration. Usually in the Strugatskys' works male characters are associated with fascism and they usually have German names or Nordic features.²⁵

The feminist Forest with its native villages is a symbol of the Russian people. Oriental Kim warns Pepper, a Russian intellectual, that he will find nothing but "bitter truth" if he attempts to enter the Forest. Kandid's experience in the Forest confirms this bitter truth: the villagers are ignorant, superstitious, impervious to enlightenment, not to speak of democratic ideals. The Forest is a symbol of what Nikolai Berdyaev identifies as the reactionary, mystical, sectarian tendencies inherent in the "feminine" character of the Russian people, and only partially a symbol of Nazism. In other words, German fascism is thoroughly "russianized" in the setting of the Forest.

The landscape of the Administration is described in terms of masculine archetypes – dry, hard, civilized (urban) and mechanical:

The Forest wasn't visible from here, but it was there. It was always there, even though you could only see it from the cliff. Everywhere else in the Administration something blocked the view. It was blocked by the cream-colored buildings of the

²⁵ Marek Parasuxin. Despite his Russian name, he is distinguished as a German person by his blond, Nordic features and his black leather SS jacket in *Burdened with Evil*

mechanical shops and the four-story garage for the official workers' private cars. It was blocked by livestock pens of the subsidiary farm, and by the wash hung out by the Laundromat where the centrifugal wringer was constantly out of order... It was blocked by cottages with verandas entwined in ivy and crowned by television antennas. From here, out of the second-story window, you couldn't see the Forest because of the high brick wall, not yet completed, but already very high- it was going up next to the float one-story building of the Group for Engineering Penetration. The Forest was only visible from the overhanging cliff (*The Snail on the Slope*, 19).

Howell suggests that the divided landscape in *The Snail on the Slope* is a symbolic representation of a divided national identity.

Pepper and Kandid are similar intellectual trapped in their environments. Darko Suvin, in his introductory essay to the unpublished Bantam edition of the novel, suggests that they represent "the two horns of the alternative facing modern intellectuals: "accommodation and refusal" (Suvin, p.19) Howell suggests that Suvin is correct only if one views the Accession as representing the same abuses of power as the Administration. It is true, that despite many differences, these two worlds mirror each other. Even though one realm is dominated by men, regulations, and technology and the other one by women, tradition, and "life" in both progress equals destruction; in both the lack of courage leads to social stagnation. But there are not two opposing entities: the Administration and the Accession, but also the villages and native population. Both Pepper and Kandid end up accepting the world-views of their respective social contexts –

bureaucracy and village – and both to some extent reject the revolting alienness of the Forest.

The Ugly Swans

The novel *The Ugly Swans* or *Gadkie Lebedi*, has less fantastic elements and sarcasm compared to the previous novels and it dwells on more serious topics. It was originally scheduled for the Soviet publication in 1968, but was pulled at the last moment and it did not come to print until 1972. However, this novel appeared as *samizdat* in 1968 and was very popular with the readers. The setting of the novel is in a rural community in one of the European countries. The main protagonist, Viktor Banev, is a hard-drinking Hemingway type writer who came home to his ex-wife to take care of his daughter Irma. The town is suffering from three years of constant rain which is caused by the residents from the near-by leper colony, known as “slimies” or “four-eyes” since their form of disease shows in a slimy yellow cast of the skin, particularly in large rings around their eyes. The slimies dress completely in black – overcoats, hats, gloves and bandages that cover their yellow rings around the eyes. It is interesting that being hated by the town populace they exercise considerable control over the children and teenagers of the town. Under the influence of slimies the children become prodigies. The town people, typically, are afraid of them and some people, called fascist thugs, hunt the individual slimies. The slimies, though human-born, are somewhat more than human and their “yellow leprosy” is less a disease than a feature of their election to the ranks of supermen. Other marks of their status are emotional frigidity and arrogance. They are insensitive to the human life

around them, except the children. They are even insensitive to their offenders – local thugs who persecute them, and they are not interested in punishing the offenders. The slimies are cruel and rational and are training children so the young generation can join them.

Victor Banev discovers this fact in a most personal way when he visits school of his daughter Irma and speaks with children. The questions and responses that he receives from his young audience are absolutely not what he expects. The center question that is discussed at the meeting with Banev in school is the future of the children and how Banev sees it. To his mind the children should be smart honest and kind. But the notion of “smartness” the two generation seem to perceive differently: for Banev, humans realize that their knowledge is limited and yet keep on leaning in order to succeed; for the children, it means superior absolute knowledge that guarantees success. They see the mankind “as a drunken coot who went through hell because he does not deserve better” (p.160).

Finally, the children speak about the spiritual renewal of the mankind; they see the mankind at the crossroads: either intellectual degradation or an evolutionary leap in consciousness. They claim to respect Banev as the author but they criticize his heroes and their values as he depicts in his fiction. They question his ideas of progress and justice. Banev cannot help feeling, and fearing, that these children are correct in their way. They do not care about the mistakes of the past or about building upon them for the future. They want to turn their backs entirely on the old generation’s values and begin completely anew. This discussion astonishes Banev and he asks himself: “How was the

new age really dawned? It seems that the future had really managed to extend its feelers into the very heart of the present, and that that future was cold and pitiless” (Collier, 74)

This problem goes though out the whole novel and haunts the protagonist till the climatic final confrontation of the old world and the new one. The entire population of youngsters disappears from the town and the town people together with local police and fascist thugs come to leprosarium to find that they cannot enter the building because of the barbed wire and armed soldiers surrounding it. A god-like voice speaks up over the incessant rain, a voice “like thunder from all sides at once. It was the voice of someone huge, arrogant, and scornful, standing with his back to the crowd and addressing it over his shoulders; the voice of someone engaged in important work and irritated, finally, by some trifle.” (p.160) The voice explains calmly but forcefully that the children left of their own free will, “because you had become totally disagreeable with them. They no longer wish to live the way you live and the way your forebears lived.” (p.161) The Voice orders everyone go home with a convincing shove from a cold, wet gust of wind. The town people feel demoralized and leave empty-handed.

Victor Banev has a mixed attitude to what has happened. On the one hand, he is glad that the police and the fascist thugs were humiliated; on the other hand, he was a part of the crowd and a distressed parent himself whose daughter left to join slimies. The slimies, as supermen, are more merciless than the children. He reflects that people’s relationships have warmth and that warmth cannot be replaced by any new system. The slimies have no human feelings, including love and sexual attraction, and Victor Banev cannot imagine a world without it, even if this new world has numerous merits. Banev is unsure if he is for or against slimies: on the one side, they are cruel, arrogant, inhuman

and have physical deformity, on the other side, they support his daughter Irma, her friends and other intelligent people. Undoubtedly, slimies are superintellectuals and they seem to have the best interest of the children in mind. In the novel that idea is reflected through the fact that the slimies and the children cannot live without books, because they do not know other form of life other than constant intellectual growth and self-development.

In the novel the slimies are “the ugly swans,” the more developed form of the species. As supermen, the slimies originated from the humans and grew and became, in effect, aliens, with alien minds, viewpoints, and powers. For humans the true natures and objectives of the slimies are impossible to understand because these natures and objectives completely reject the old humanity, with its vices and virtues. Following the climax, the populace flees the town and Victor stays behind to watch the New Order unfold. It does not happen like Nazi New Order, a ruthless displacement of one group by another. Instead, the rain disappears and the sun comes out and the town simply evaporates. There is no trace of the slimies either, but Banev’s daughter Irma and her boy-friend Bol-Kunats, both suddenly adults walk hand in hand through the new spring. Victor has to admit the kindness of the new world, though he says to himself, that he does not belong here.

This novel stands apart from the rest of the novels discussed above, it more resembles the works like *The Second Martian Invasion*, *Roadside Picnic*, and *The Time Wanderers*. The main theme that unites these four novels is the birth of superman or Übermensch; a new alien generation completely denounces the old values and disputes

the right of humans to exist and replaces it with a more intellectual and rational but inhuman regime.

Despite the fact that the novel's main theme differs from the other novels that I have chosen to analyze, one of the themes yet echoes the theme in the novel *The Final Circle of Paradise* and *Far Rainbow* that the future lies in children and they are the creators of the future, but these novels give perspectives of different kinds of the future. While in *The Final Circle of Paradise* and *Far Rainbow* it is more optimistic, in *The Ugly Swans* it symbolizes the end of human race.

In 2006 the novel was made into a Russian science fiction film directed by Konstantin Lopushansky. Though the movie and the book are very similar, there are a few discrepancies with the novel, major one being the film's ending, in which the Slimies are all killed by the humans. Further on, in the movie the children are heroically rescued by Banev, but they are unable to re-assimilate into society and are institutionalized. Thus, the film director suggests an alternative dénouement which seems more pro-human. Though this version seems intellectually-wise less progressive, it gives hope for the future inhabited by humans.

It should be noted that the period when the novels *The Snail on the Slope* and *The Ugly Swans* were written, Russian critics call "Alarmism". The Strugatskys were questioning the impact of hippie culture, feminist culture and environmental culture on society as they saw these trends as frightening but inevitably important in the future.

Burdened with Evil

Arkady and Boris Strugatsky's last novel *Otiagoshchennye Zlom*, known in English as *Burdened with Evil, or Forty Years Later* was written in 1988. According to Boris Strugatsky, *Burdened with Evil* was meant to be "a novel about three Christs." Thus this novel has three plot lines.

The first plot line is set in the twentieth century in the Soviet Union in the 1980s. The setting is the provincial Soviet town named Tashlinsk. The fictional name can be interpreted as an amalgam of Tashkent and Minsk, i.e., a symbolic place name in the Soviet Union. In the town there appeared two supernatural creature, Demiurg and Agasfer Lukich. They exist outside time and space because they are anthropomorphized. Demiurg and Agasfer Lukich are all mighty and can make all people's dreams come true. However, everything they do is burdened with evil: any wish that they fulfill for people always has an underside – these people always lose something in return (either things or abilities that they used to have before). For example, an astronomer who was disabled asked Agasfer Lukich to give him physical health, so when the astronomer was cured he was able to move and do sport but his scientific talent completely disappeared and he became a mediocre man and eventually drunk himself to death.

Demiurg's main aim in the novel is to find a Person, who can cure him from the evil. He receives people with various projects on how to make the world better but none of these people is the Person he is looking for.

The first plot line of the novel is told by the narrator, Igor Mytarin, who alternates excerpts from his own diary (dated in the mid-twenty-first century) with excerpts from

the mysterious manuscript given to him by his teacher G.A. Nosov. The manuscript is in fact a diary of an astronomer who worked at the Steppe Observatory forty years earlier, in the last decade of the twentieth century. The astronomer's diary describes the visit of a Demiurge and Agasfer Lukich (or Wandering Jew) to Tashlinsk. The astronomer's diary belongs to our present time, but is presented as a historical document.

In the second plot line, one of the two fundamental motifs, created to form the Legend of the Wandering Jew is the motif of the violence, or insult, inflicted upon the Savior by an officer of the High Priest (John.18:20-22), whose slave, named Malchus, is identified with the officer. The punishment inflicted upon the one who offended Christ is that he will be doomed to eternal wandering. The motif of eternal wandering was borrowed from the Legend of St. John, according to which John has never died. Thus Agasfer Lukich has this identity of a waiter (for the Second Advent) and a wanderer.

In his late twentieth-century incarnation on the satirical-fantastic planet of the Strugatsky's text, Agasfer Lukich is a buffoonish character that can be compared to Mikhail Bulgakov's character Behemoth in *The Master and Margarita*. During his stay in the town of Tashlinsk, he pretends to be an insurance agent who rents a room in the same hotel-dormitory in which the astronomer resides. One night the astronomer is awakened in the middle of the night by a loud voice of a visitor, talking to Agasfer Lukich who does not let him enter Demiurge's reception room. The Wandering Jew's twentieth-century incarnation as a provincial Soviet insurance agent is summarized by the narrator's observation that:

the corner of a black woolen scarf was sticking out from under Agasfer's shirt. He wore this scarf at night as a waistband for protection against the onset of rheumatism. He hadn't even had time to put on his false ear... (610).

Only the mention of the false ear serves to remind that the Wandering Jew is also linked, in some versions of the legend, to the slave Malchus, whose ear was cut off by Simon Peter.

The third plot line of the novel is set in the 2030-s in Tashlinsk in the gymnasium organized by the teacher G.A. Nosov. The teacher's full name is Georgij Anatol'yevich but throughout the text his full name is mentioned only several times, most of the time he is called G.A. Thus, his name has a direct allusion on the name of Ga-Notsri, a Syriack name of Jesus from the Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita*. The story is told by G.A. Nosov's student, Igor Mytarin, whose name is also an allusion on the evangelist Matfei, a martyr. Mytarin has Nosov's manuscript and the last pages from the manuscript are missing which makes the readers think that G.A. Nosov is the Person that Demiurg is looking for. At the end of the novel G.A. Nosov disappears and readers can only suppose that this happens because he was found by Demiurg as the Person who can cure the latter from evil. Sometime later, G.A. Nosov becomes a legendary figure, admired by the society and whose ideas became widely accepted.

This complex novel has another plot line that interlaces with the story of G.A. In the woods near the town of Tashlinsk there appeared a community of escapists names Flora. This community reminds the hippie movement with a master named Nusi, who is the spiritual guide of the community. The philosophy of Nusi is very simple – a person does not need much from the society, everyone has the right to do whatever he wants if

he does not do harm to others. The community believed that one should not ask for too much and everything that people truly need, will be given to them by the world. In their opinion the only aim of people's lives is the spiritual fusion with the Universe and complete rest. In the novel the community members are described as lazy, slack people who are slowly becoming antisocial and who are degrading. In this community it is common to use drugs and have sex. The main question in the third part of the novel is "what should be done with the community Flora?" It starts with a heated discussion between Mayor, G.A.'s colleagues and G.A. himself, and finally, ends up with the police being involved. G.A. Nosov does not argue for Flora's existence but at the time he does not wish the destruction of the community either. He thinks that the forceful intervention and destruction in the community is wrong.

The moral-ethical problem with the Flora community is one of the main in the novel. It raises the following questions: Does the society have the right to forcefully destroy the informal cooperation of escapists that is harmless for the society? Does the society have the right to guard people against their personal degradation that stems from their informal culture? Is the philosophy of Flora – degradation or the utmost truth? Can people with the same mindset and life views live in a closed community without having pressure from the outside world even if their life views are despised by the rest of the society? These questions are not directly answered in the novel but they provoke readers' speculation on these problems. The themes of counter culture and the informal youth movements being very popular in the second part of the 80s are very important in the novel.

The Strugatskys' favorite techniques that are also presented in this novel are sharp sarcasm and paradox. At the end of the novel readers learn that Nusi, the leader of Flora is the son of G.A. Nosov. We can draw a parallel between the father and his son and say that Nusi occupies in Flora the same position as his father does in his respective society: they both are guru and ideological leaders. However, the son rejects father's ideas because he cannot find a spiritual place in the society so he creates his own informal group Flora. Thus, we can see a paradox: the son who was brought up by his father grows to hate the society that he was brought up in. Here we can make a conclusion that Flora was produced by the society, and symbolizes all its vices.

The themes that are raised by the Flora movement echo with the themes of the earlier Strugatskys' novels: *The Final Circle of Paradise*, *The Ugly Swans*, *The Snail on the Slope* and *Hard to be God*; these novels have a number of common themes. For instance, *The Snail on the Slope* Kandid leaves in a forest and continues his lonely war against the Accession, just like Flora members alone contradict the values of the whole society. The same idea can be traced in the novel *The Ugly Swans* where children see the hypocrisy, pretense and the false nature of their parents and leave their parents' world of perverted values to create their own world that is substantially different and alien from the world of older generation. In the novel *Hard to be God* Anton Don Rumata is an intervener who is sent to the planet of Arkanar to forcefully spread progress and change its government structure. By the same token police of Tashlinsk interferes in the conflict between society and the community trying to destroy the informal youth movement and forcefully change the values and way of life of its members.

The critics propose that one of the most sustained motif in *Burdened with Evil* is the life of Christ, which is refracted through the characterization of “G.A. Nosov,” the Demiurge, and the historical Jesus Agasfer Lukich or Wandering Jew. However, the novel is equally a novel about false prophets. After two thousand years of Christianity, the humanity depicted in this novel is less prepared than ever for the Second Advent. Each Christ figure in the novel is foiled by false prophets, including Stalin, Hitler and the “punk” leader of the counter-culture commune.

The Strugatskys introduce little known or forgotten texts and force the reader to rediscover the source of the literary pattern. The novel plays with similarities and discrepancies between post-modern scientific discourse and the religion world view of the Christian heresy known as Gnosticism. The novel speaks about the human knowledge gained through mystical and esoteric revelation and the inherent evil of all matter.

The setting of the novel is intentionally filled with half-familiar “images” which represent the concepts and the texts the authors wish the readers to recall. In the *Burdened with Evil*, one of the narrator’s rooms has a painting signed by “Adolf Schickelgruber” (Hitler’s real name). Hitler himself is not mentioned in the text of the plot per se, but the influence of his ideological presence is noted.

The uniqueness of the Strugatskys’ style is that it erases the distinction between contemporary realistic and science fiction settings. On the one hand, the protagonists seem to exist outside of historical time and space like in the gnostic manuscript of *Burdened with Evil*, yet they are also palpable and obvious within the Soviet Union in the last decade of the twentieth century. The setting mediates between the fantastic and the realistic layers of the text; it accommodates both simultaneously. (Howell, 106)

In this novel the radical dualism divides the world into Good and Evil. The symbolism of Darkness versus Light; this world versus the world “beyond,” and “burdened with evil” versus “pure” spirit, is particularly well developed in the Manichaeian strain of gnostic thought²⁶, and Samuel Lieu, Manichaeism²⁷. In the Manichaeian division of the world into God’s realm (Light) and Devil’s realm (Darkness), the earthy existence we live in, i.e., our material existence, belongs entirely to the realm of the Devil. In the exclusively good realm of God, there are no human beings; there is only pure (non-material) spirit. Thus to live in a human body is to live with evil, but to live without evil, as pure spirit, is by definition to cease to be a human being. (Howell, 123)

²⁶ Jonas, Hans. “The Gnostic Religion.” 2nd ed. Boston: Beacon Press. 1963.

²⁷ Manchester and Dover, N.H.; Manchester University Press, 1985.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

Since the beginning of their career in the late 50-s, the Strugatskys explored in their science fiction the contradictory relationship between the utopianism, anti-utopianism and rationalism.

In the Strugatskys works they create a double exposure of two narrative planes: the realistic depiction of a contemporary society in crisis and the fantastic depiction of a contemporary society's myths about the origins and solutions to the crisis. Their science fiction does not rely on the hard sciences and technologies for its imagery. The role of science in their works is subtle and more profound. The paradigms of science have a powerful presence in all of their writing. The development of science, the dynamics of science, the "way the science was done" in the Soviet Union are important to their plots. The Strugatskys were personally connected to science and worked with Russian scientists; they were knowledgeable in this subject area and knew the dominant research trends and shifting scientific paradigms that they reflected in their works.

As I have shown in this work there is a clear set of themes that unify the works of Arkady and Boris Strugatsky. Their recurrent themes are Soviet bureaucracy, human nature with its vices, virtues and different values, intervention in another civilization with the purpose of forcing progress, hippie movement and mentality and children as the symbol of a better future.

A dominant theme, perhaps, is the disparity between the idealistic hopes for humankind's future, portrayed in their early phase, and the deep doubts growing out of the empirical observation of human nature. The increasing frustration and anger infuses

the work spanning the decade from the mid-sixties to mid-seventies reveals the wish to continue to believe in man's potential, but darkened by the fear that the future may turn out to be too much like the present.

As science fiction writers, the Strugatskys criticized the abuse of science, the faulty approach to the unknown, and the waste of human lives and minds. Of paramount importance to the brothers Strugatsky was the linking of science and morality: the pursuit of knowledge must serve the best interests of mankind. This attitude was summed up in what Darko Suvin has called their "credo":

Science fiction is the literature dealing with the ethics and responsibilities of the scientists...with what those, on whose hands lies the realization of the highest achievements of human knowledge, feel and how they relate to their work... Each scientist has to be a revolutionary humanist, otherwise the inertia of history will shunt him into the ranks of irresponsible scoundrels leading the world to its destruction. (Quoted by Suvin in his Introduction to *The Snail on the Slope*, p.19).

The term "revolutionary humanist" is significant as the Strugatskys are frequently critical of aspects of Soviet society – bureaucratic rigidity and inefficiency, militarism, and police harassment. They continue to hope for a socialist-style world united in peace, prosperity, and social progress.

The most overt criticism came in their critical fantasies of the late sixties, where the Strugatskys came closest in style to the officially sanctioned satire. The controversy over the brother Strugatskys' work loomed largest in the Soviet press and when they had the most trouble publishing their work in book form, for example *The Snail on the Slope* did not appear as such in Russia. In his interview Arkady Strugatsky noted:

Some sent *The Ugly Swans* to the West, and the story came out from [the émigré publishing house] Possev. Even though we published a protest in 1972 in *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, we were put on the blacklist, and for many publishers our very name became an object of fear.

In the Soviet Union there existed the idea that “useful books should be published regardless of popularity and that others should remain either unpublished or published in small editions because of political factors is likely to prevail.”²⁸ Actions of censorship were taken against the Strugatskys: the editor of the article Angara was fined for publishing the *Tale of Troika*. All issues containing these works were removed from general circulation at the Lenin Library.

The pathfinder role of the Strugatskys is best summed up by the influential Soviet critic, Britikov:

The works of the Strugatskys are characteristic of how sharp and complex Soviet fantastic novels have become, with their serious sociological themes and the problems facing man...Soviet science fiction encompasses various genres – social utopias, philosophical novels, satirical and psychological, and, conversely, a free and skillful prognostic striving to divide the path of the development of the world – from science and technology to the future history of mankind.²⁹

Truly, Arkady and Boris Strugatsky reflected in their science fiction novels the Soviet spirit and the most acute problems and tendencies in the Soviet society. They were

²⁸ Glad, John Pater. “Soviet Science Fiction.” p.147.

²⁹ Britikov, Anatolii. “Soviet Science Fiction Novel.” p.359.

the forerunners of Russian science fiction who shaped the genre of science fiction in Russia and made their novels unique compared to the large number of Western science fiction models. They formed the science fiction of today as well and the themes and ideas from their novels can be seen in a number of books and films produced in Russia and in the West, the most bright example being film *Avatar* (2008). The Strugatskys' books are interesting to the Western reader because their novels give a new insight into the hidden area of Russian personality at the time when every bit of understanding was essential.³⁰

It is very important to keep in mind while reading the Strugatskys' novels that the most interesting in their novels is not what is on the surface but what is hidden, implicit: a deep fear for the future of mankind, not only the Soviet Union or totalitarian regime but human kind as a whole. In their works they see the development of human kind very pessimistically (in the novel *The Ugly Swans*, for instance) but they leave a hope that only some selected superintelligent people with super powers eventually would be able to survive in the degenerating society.

In summary, in the Soviet Union the Strugatskys' obvious political overtones of Soviet science fiction scenes have made them popular with readers. Presently, in contemporary Russia of 2011 the Strugatskys' novels are published, widely read and openly discussed as well as the movies that were filmed based on their numerous novels are appreciated by the Soviet and the twenty first century generation. Even though the death of the elder brother, Arkady, brought the collaboration to the natural end Boris Strugatsky continues to publish under the pen-name "S. Vititsky", but his solo novels are not as popular among readers as the previous novels written with Arkady. (Kluger, 415)

³⁰ Milcha, "Science fiction today." p.176.

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